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FEEDING LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE FOG OF FLUX: ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATIONAL SUCCESS AMIDST PERPETUAL CHANGE

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Exercise *Solo Flight*

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Introduction

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus opined, "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man."[1] This premise is at the foundation of the doctrine of perpetual flux in that all things are in a constant state of change. Today's global security environment is no different, as evidenced by former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli's comment that "change is inevitable and change is constant."[2] If it is acknowledged that the world is in a persistent state of change, how is success of deliberate change initiatives effectively measured amidst a perpetually evolving environment? This same challenge holds for evaluating the success of the 2005 Canadian Forces (CF) Transformation initiative which sought to completely reform the military's cultural and operational posture all while heavily engaged at the high watermark of the war in Afghanistan. Although regarded as largely successful and revolutionary, there appear to be cracks forming in the armor of the CF Transformation.[3] Determining if these flaws are the result of a failed change effort or just the result of the perpetual flux of the environment is fundamental to assessing the success of the Transformation. This paper will examine the CF Transformation to show that successful change can only be attained if the scope of the change is properly identified, critical metrics to measure performance are established, and viable feedback capabilities are employed to adapt to an ever-changing environment. To meet this objective, a framework

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[1] Goodreads, "Quotes by Heraclitus", accessed 22 May 2015, http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/117526-no-man-ever-steps-in-the-same-river-twice-for.

[2] Michael Rostek, "Managing Change in DND." In *The Public Management of Defence,* edited by J.C. Stone. Toronto: Breakout Education, 2009. Rostek, 217

[3] Ibid, 230

is developed that first examines the keys to properly scoping change objectives.

Secondly, the model will identify sensory techniques to gauge the success of change

efforts. Following this definition, the importance of operational feedback in the change

process will be explored. Throughout this paper, the framework will be applied to the CF

Transformation to evaluate the overall success of the initiative as well as validate the

framework itself.

Framework for Change Success
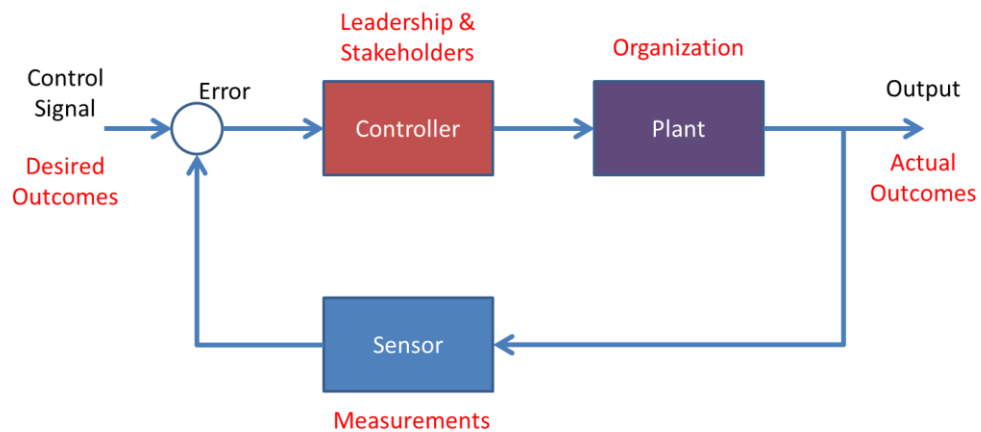
Figure: Framework for Successful Change amidst Perpetual Flux

The framework for change success in an environment of perpetual flux is modeled

against a basic feedback system from control systems theory, as shown in the figure. The

control signal or *input* represents the desired result of the change effort. This result

requires a specific scope and can be driven by both internal and external organizational

factors. The *error* represents the delta between the desired outcomes and the actual

measured outcomes of the change. Kuipers et al. acknowledge that there is a difference

between output and outcomes. Change outcomes are "substantive results from the

implementation of change that can be intended or unintended and positive or negative."[4] Outputs, on the other hand, are tangible, clear results from deliberate change activities and are easier to measure since the metrics captured are designed around these intended outputs. However, since change focuses on changing behaviors, there are unpredicted and unanticipated consequences that arise as change progresses.[5] This requires the development of a *sensor* that is attune to the full spectrum of outcomes from change initiatives. The *controller* represents the leader or stakeholders which process the sensor data to make the necessary modifications to the *plant*, representing the organization, in order to achieve the desired outcome.

Properly Scoping Change Objectives and Duration

Defining the scope of change is paramount in a fluid changing environment. The key components of properly scoping a change initiative are defining a clear vision and identifying the duration of the change activities. Articulating vision begins with a high-level description of the future state of the organization but must evolve to a tactical roadmap that channels the energy of the change activities. Oakland and Tanner state that in order to manage change successfully, "there is a need for a focus on both strategic and operational issues, with both being closely linked."[6] This linkage is attained through the development of an effective roadmap of change efforts. The roadmap starts with the end in mind and focuses on goals, roles, and responsibilities.[7] Identifying controlled and

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[4] Ben S. Kuipers, et al. "The Management of Change in Public Organizations: A Literature Review." *Public Administration* 92, no 1, 2014, 12.

[5] Philip Atkinson, "OD Strategies: Installing a Lean and Continuous Improvement Culture." *Management Services*, Winter 2014, 13.

[6] J.S. Oakland & Stephen Tanner, "Successful Change Management." *Total Quality Management* 18, Nos 1-2, 1-19, January-March 2007, 5.

[7] Eric Carter, "Successful Change Requires More Than Change Management", The Journal for Quality & Participation, Spring 2008, 21.

uncontrolled variables that influence the outcomes of the process are crucial to measure

both the intended and unintended consequences of change. The controlled variables are

the targets of change activities where leadership effort is applied to induce change. The

uncontrolled variables represent the areas out of direct control of leadership activities.

From a CF perspective, controlled variables include command structures, personnel end

strength, or public opinion of the military. Uncontrolled variables include the

international security climate, national economic vitality, and governmental/political

actions. The development of a viable vision and roadmap begins with identification of the

controlled variables to focus planned changes and anticipate emergent changes. "In

planned change approaches, outcomes are defined in advance, whereas in emergent

change approaches, outcomes emerge during the change process."[8]

Defining the duration is also a critical component to properly scoping change

initiatives. This is particularly important to ensuring proper control of both the controlled

and uncontrolled variables. The longer a change activity progresses, the more probable

that emergent issues will arise and cause unintended consequences on the components.

The impact of these perpetual changes on the environment often leads to changes not

standing the test of time and a perception of failure of the change. It is for this reason that

Rostek asserts, "To effect sustainable change, a leader must move small and fast. Small

in the sense of achieving short term wins and fast is generally accepted to mean 6-8

months for a large organization."[9] Narrowing the window of the focus of the change

decreases the potential impact of other factors, namely uncontrolled variables on the

effort. Conducting frequent reviews of change initiatives provides a vehicle to insert

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[8] Kuipers, et al, 12
[9] Rostek, 229

valuable feedback from emergent changes to uncontrolled variables. Sirkin, Keenan, and Jackson state, "The probability that change initiatives will run into trouble rises exponentially when time between reviews exceeds eight weeks."[10] Coupling reviews with a short execution window, postures change efforts for minimal adverse impacts due to persistent change forces.

From the CF Transformation perspective, General Hillier, the principal architect of the 2005 Transformation, was successful in clearly outlining his vision. The three fundamental changes implicit in General Hillier's vision were a shift of institutional focus toward domestic and continental security, while playing a greater role on the world stage; a paradigm shift in command philosophy; and the development of an integrated CF culture focused on mission accomplishment.[11] The roadmap aspect of this vision was facilitated by the creation of the operational-level headquarters which restored the CF focus back on warfighting effectiveness. In this case, the Transformation was aided by Hiller properly sensing the state of key uncontrolled variables: fiscal prosperity and the evolving security environment. The shift from the Cold-War mantra was made possible by the CF commitment to the Global War on Terrorism as well as the emergence of regional conflicts and an enemy unconstrained by traditional nationalistic borders. These factors drove increased funding for the military and widespread support for revolutionary change within the CF. Driving a paradigm shift in command philosophy, on the other hand, required much more diligence in achieving success. These changes were rooted in the creation of an operationally focused CF command structure guided by a mission-

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[10] Harold L. Sirkin, Perry Keenan, and Alan Jackson, "The Hard Side of Change Management." *Harvard Business Review,* October 2005, 3.

[11] Lieutenant-General (Retired) Michael K. Jeffery. "Inside CF Transformation." *Canadian Military Journal* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2010), 14

command leadership philosophy and determined to decentralize the execution of operations.[12] However, this objective was not met without difficulties and continues to evolve in its execution. As English noted, this revolutionary command arrangement fostered an "inability of the strategic level to maintain control of the operational commanders."[13] Despite this observation, the changes brought forth during the transformation effort were successful in streamlining the command framework and providing the operational flexibility necessary to operate effectively in a modern warfare environment. As time progresses, this friction may erode the perceived success of this effort, particularly if not reviewed and addressed with future change initiatives. Finally, the integrated culture that Hillier sought to create was also facilitated by the increased operational tempo and the urgency placed on the reform measures. This urgency helped to narrow the change window and take advantage of the increased operations tempo. As more CF personnel were thrust to into the cauldron of war, the reinforcement of an operationally-focused culture became easier to sell to the troops.

Measuring Intended and Unintended Consequences of Change

Measuring actual outcomes is critical to sensing the impact of both the intended and unintended consequences of change efforts. According to Oakland and Tanner, "Performance measurement was as critical to assessing the levels of performance both before and after the change, and providing a control during the change."[14] This sensory capability is the fundamental feedback that the leadership and other stakeholders use to evolve organizational change initiatives. Atkinson adds, "Although feedback is crucial in

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[12] Brigadier-General Daniel Gosselin and Dr. Craig Stone, "Inside CF Transformation." *Canadian Military Journal* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2010), 11

[13] Allan English. "Outside Transformation CF Looking In." *Canadian Military Journal* 11, no. 2 (Sping 2011), 16

[14] Oakland and Tanner, 14

letting us fine-tune our trajectory for change, little resource and energy is devoted to capturing data that indicates the extent to which we have mad specific and tangible progress."[15] Despite significant emphasis being placed on realizing outcomes, the lack of effective measurement of these outcomes adversely impacts the ability to manage change in a fluid environment. Oakland and Tanner stress, "Most metrics and targets put in place to measure the success of the change relate back to the drivers and expected benefits."[16] This observation indicates that the metrics focus is on the planned change approaches and not necessarily the emerging outcomes. Further, since the environment is in constant motion, measurement of an outcome is simply a snapshot in time and depends heavily on the frequency or accuracy of that measurement. As a result, "the actual effects of organizational change are not always reported."[17] It is for this reason that Reichard emphasizes that it is "impossible to make success statements because many changes are still ongoing."[18] To be effective, measurements must account for both outcomes due to both controlled and uncontrolled variables identified in the initial stages of the change process. This requires the development of relevant metrics to understand what controlled variables can be influenced to deliver the appropriate organizational change. Atkinson takes this concept further by emphasizing the need to focus not only on the quantitative but also the qualitative means of measuring culture and behavior change. "The need to be able to focus upon the critical incidents that indicate whether a change has been accepted or not, or whether a new process is working."[19]

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[15] Atkinson, 14
[16] Oakland and Tanner, 6
[17] Kuipers, et al., 13
[18] C. Reichard, "Local Public Management Reforms in Germany." *Public Administration* 81, no. 2, (2003) 345
[19] Atkinson, 14

From the onset, Hiller utilized both quantitative and qualitative measurements to gauge the CF's capacity for change and where to focus change efforts. The dilapidated state of the CF, coupled with a significant evolution of national security environment, were crucial drivers that shaped the CF transformation. Jeffery characterized the CF at the turn of the millennium as "structurally and culturally constipated; focused upon industrial age warfare; a hollow force with declining military effectiveness; …poor and declining morale; and the lack of a clear and positive vision for the future."[20] This assessment highlighted a military force that was grossly unprepared for the transformation of the national security picture following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and an associated shift from conventional to asymmetric warfare. Hillier, added "Many of us in uniform felt that our lack of preparedness—in people, equipment and culture—had not permitted us to be as effective an organization as our nation deserved."[21] Both Jeffery and Hillier honed in on the key aims that would form the key metrics of the transformation: people, culture, and equipment. A lasting cultural change is imperative for any successful transformation. Kotter observed, "Until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are subject to degradation as soon as the pressure for change is removed."[22] This exemplifies the declining perceptions of success of the CF Transformation. Following the void created by Hiller's departure, the end of operations in Afghanistan, and a renewed focus on fiscal efficiency, many of the kinks began to show since the sensory metrics that formed the basis of the change were not persistently assessed. Secondly, people and their buy-in to the transformation process are crucial for

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[20] Jeffery, 10.

[21] General (Retired) Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War*. Toronto: Harper Collins, 2009, 3.

[22] John P. Kotter. "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail." *Harvard Business Review* 73, no. 2 (Mar/Apr 1995), 6.

the transformation to take shape and perpetuate throughout the organization. Strebel states, "Regardless of the cultural context, unless the revision of personal compacts is treated as integral to the change process, companies will not accomplish their goals."[23] This requires continued measurement of both the quantitative and qualitative impacts of these personal compacts. Finally, equipment is a foundational component of any military force and neglecting this aspect would demonstrate a lack of institutional commitment to the proposed changes. As Gosselin and Stone observed, "General Hillier's immediate focus is on initiating the introduction of new military capabilities."[24] Again, the introduction of these new capabilities was based on the assessment of the operational requirements at the time. Without consistent feedback on the evolution of the operational environment, coupled with an agile acquisition process, the equipment integration piloted by Hiller will not stand the test of time. Ultimately, the attention paid to the current state of the CF at the onset of the Transformation, postured it for success. However, as it transitioned to execution, the lack of focus, particularly on uncontrolled variables, reduced its probability of being viewed as a longstanding success.

Adaptable Leadership through Feedback

Ultimately it is the leader (controller) that provides the intelligence to process the actual outcomes against the desired outcome to determine the response on the organization. To properly process this information the desired outcome must be properly vetted and appropriate metrics identified to measure these outcomes. The key to enacting the necessary change modifications in a fluid environment is to properly interpret the

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[23] Paul Strebel. "Why Do Employees Resist Change?" *Harvard Business Review* 74, no. 3 (May/Jun 1996), 92.
[24] Gosselin and Stone, 11.

deltas between the measured and desired. Atkinson asserts, "A failure to understand and access relevant feedback means that we have no means of knowing whether we are nearer to or further away from our goal." However, this requires the leader to be effectively grounded and attune to the full spectrum of the change environment. Lord, Dinh, and Hoffman claim, "Prospective errors can manifest as forecasting biases that unduly influence decision making and behavior in ways that fail to account for the uncertainty and nonlinearity of realistic organizational events."[25] The reality of change in a perpetually changing environment requires persistent monitoring of the sensors monitoring the controlled and uncontrolled variables. This involves continually challenging priorities, structures, and performance metrics to ensure they are driving the desired behaviors and delivering the required benefits.[26]

The employment of a continuous improvement process adeptly postures the CF for success in a continually changing environment.[27]In the case of the CF Transformation, a dynamic leader at the helm of the CF coupled with a supportive civilian sector proved to be the critical institutional leadership components for transformational success. General Hillier proved to be the right leader at the right time to usher the drastic changes to the CF. As Stewart noted, "The transformation of the CF organizational culture is completely dependent upon CF leadership effectively working within the…civil-military relationship."[28] General Hillier had a knack for working within this construct and his effectiveness in this arena was demonstrated in his garnering of the

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[25] Robert G. Lord, Jessica E. Dinh, and Ernest L. Hoffman, "A Quantum Approach to Time and Organizational Change." *Academy of Management Review* 40, no. 2, (2015), 266.
[26] Oakland and Tanner, 15.
[27] Rostek, 216
[28] Pamela Stewart, "On Broader Themes of Canadian Forces Transformation." *Canadian Military Journal* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), 16.

"largest reinvestment in Canada's military in over 20 years."[29] His ability to sense the

political landscape and apply the appropriate leadership emphasis contributed greatly to

the initial success of the Transformation. Additionally, he was able to cultivate the

respect and admiration of those that served under him. Without these components, the

people aspect of the transformational scope would have been impossible to address.

Additionally, General Hillier also promoted a partnership approach between the military

and the civilian government. By taking this stance he was able to simultaneously

challenge the government to evolve as well. Hillier stated, "We have to do more to

develop leadership in its ranks (Government of Canada) and change the culture to one of

product over process and effect over policy."[30] This desire for a holistic evolution of

government resonated soundly with the Canadian people which further increased General

Hillier's influence capital. In the end, the evolving national security landscape and

resources were available to move the transformation efforts forward, but it was General

Hillier's concise vision and methodical approach that pushed it over the top. Evaluating

these changes across the duration of Hiller's tenure indicate that they were largely

successful. In the years following his departure, the unraveling of these changes began to

call into question the effectiveness and ultimately success of these efforts. However, the

leadership of the CF must not be biased to the perception of these reforms, instead must

continue to embrace the concepts of continuous improvement and instigate change based

on the sensory feedback of the organizational climate. Lord, Dinh, and Hoffman

proclaim, success "can be better appreciated by starting with an unconstrained future with

many possible outcomes and realizing that its flow into the present can be influenced by

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[29] Gosselin and Stone, 10
[30] Hillier, 40

many individual, collective, and environmental factors that guide unfolding, organizing processes."[31]

Conclusion

This paper examined the CF Transformation to show that successful change can only be attained if the scope of the change is properly identified, critical metrics to measure performance are established, and viable feedback capabilities are employed to adapt to an ever-changing environment. The framework for change success in an environment of perpetual flux was modeled against a basic feedback system. The critical components of that system included the desired outcomes, the leader, the organization being evolved, and the metrics used to gauge the effectiveness of change activities. The key components of properly scoping a change initiative are defining a clear vision and identifying the duration of the change activities. Once the vision is translated into an actionable roadmap, measuring actual outcomes is critical to sensing the impact of both the intended and unintended consequences of change efforts. Guiding change efforts through the gauntlet of consequences requires a leader that is attune to the influence of both controlled and uncontrolled variables. This framework assessed the CF Transformation and found that for the duration of the change activity, the efforts were successful in producing a shift from a post-Cold War mindset, a change in command philosophy, and the development of a mission-focused culture. However, as the security environment has evolved, the lasting success of these reforms has come into question. Moving forward, the CF must not become paralyzed by analyzing the success or failure

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[31] Lord, Dinh, and Hoffman, 264

of the Transformation, but to continue to apply the framework to seek perpetual

improvement in a persistently evolving global environment.

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